

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT GENERAL BENJAMIN  
MIXON, COMMANDER, U.S. ARMY PACIFIC VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 9:03 A.M. EST DATE:  
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LINDY KYZER (Army Public Affairs): Okay. Well, my clock turned to  
9:00 A.M. So we have three other folks who are supposed to be on the line. If  
they do join, then we can harass them for oversleeping on a Friday. But we'll  
go ahead and get started.

Again, this is Lindy Kyzer, with Army Public Affairs. Thank you so  
much, everyone, for being on the line. We're thrilled to have with us this  
morning Lieutenant General Benjamin Mixon, commanding general of U.S. Army  
Pacific. He's going to be discussing Exercise Cobra Gold, which is a two-week  
annual joint training exercise taking place this year February 4th through the  
17th.

So with that, I'll turn it over to Lieutenant General Mixon for a few  
minutes of opening remarks.

GEN. MIXON: Right. Thanks for allowing me to spend a little time with  
you this morning to talk about another in a series of engagements in the --  
for the U.S. Army in the Pacific on behalf of U.S. Pacific Command.

This is the 28th annual Cobra Gold exercise that has been conducted.  
And over the years, it has grown dramatically from a bilateral exercise done  
strictly -- (inaudible) -- U.S. military and with Thailand to a coalition of  
player that includes the countries of Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia and Japan  
participating in the exercise and the training.

In addition to that, we also have invitations that were extended by the  
Royal Thai Government to Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, France, Italy, Nepal,  
the Philippines, United Kingdom and Vietnam to also participate. And we have  
many representatives from those countries. We also have a United Nations piece  
to the scenario, which includes countries such as Brunei, Canada, Germany,  
India, Laos, Mongolia, Pakistan, People's Republic of China, South Korea and Sri  
Lanka.

So we're doing a lot of multi-echelon training and we're also doing  
tactical training in the field of a joint nature with all the services of the  
U.S. military.

Last, but not least, we do a series of humanitarian relief projects in Thailand, repairing schools, medical activities to work with the Thai people to show the good face of the American military.

It's a multifaceted exercise, allows us to get some great training with our partners out here in the Pacific, and certainly shows the interest that we have in creating those partnerships with Thailand and also all the other countries.

So having said that, I'll pause and just take any questions that you might have.

MS. KYZER: Okay. Chuck with America's North Shore Journal, did you have a question?

Q Yes, I do. Good morning, General. Thank you for taking the time to talk with us. I wanted to -- first of all, I heard you say Vietnam. Are they observing, or are they actually involved in some of the training?

GEN. MIXON: In this particular case, they are acting as observers. And they have an interest in participating in the training in the future.

Q Oh, wow. And where in Thailand are most of these exercises being conducted? Because I know they have a security situation in that isthmus that extends southward from the main part of the country.

GEN. MIXON: Yes. There is a security issue internal to Thailand that they're dealing with. Our operations are principally in the north, around the town of Chiang Mai, but we also have some operations down on the coast. But we're well clear of any potential problems that exist in the southern portion of Thailand.

Q All right. Thank you.

MS. KYZER: And Rob Stewart with NCO Call, did you have a question?

Q Well, actually, I did have one question, because I have participated in a Cobra Gold. I was there in '98 in (Chanthaburi ?). And it is a great exercise. I'm wondering -- I didn't realize this was the 28th annual one, though. Because of the war on terrorism and the -- I'm wondering, does USARPAC have an issue with funding operations like this? Have you had to scale back, or have you been able to keep the same intensity of training over the years?

GEN. MIXON: Funding has not been an issue in the last couple of years. The only adjustment that we've had to make is -- particularly on the Army side -- is we have used National Guard forces for some of the tactical training, like we have a National Guard battalion out of the New York National Guard that is participating in the tactical training.

But we're able to accomplish all of our training objectives all the way from the tactical to the operational level.

And I should say that this particular Cobra Gold is important to U.S. Army Pacific because we are developing an operational command post that will allow us to have a command and control element that can deploy from Hawaii into the Pacific region. So we are using that particular command post structure to

participate as a part of the Combined Joint Task Force as well as the portion the portion the JTF is overseeing the tactical training.

MS. KYZER: Okay. It sounds like we had someone else join on the line. Is there anyone else out there with a question?

Q Hi. It's Christian Lowe with military.com

MS. KYZER: Hi, Christian.

Q Hey.

General Mixon, a couple questions here. First a follow-up to an answer you just gave. You said you've been using National Guard forces for the tactical training. Is that because regular Army forces were not available to do the training because of deployments to Iraq?

GEN. MIXON: Either because of deployments or they have returned and they're in the reset mode. So we've been using a lot of National Guard elements for our engagements throughout the area. I think that as we look at the rotations and the extended dwell time that we anticipate our forces getting from the war, we'll begin to transition to use a mix of active and National Guard. But National Guard units have stepped up to the plate. And quite frankly, with the combat experience that most of those units have, we see little to no difference between their participation in these types of exercises and active duty forces.

Q Is there going to be National Guard troops in this most recent Cobra Gold, or active duty guys?

GEN. MIXON: We have a combination. I have a National Guard infantry battalion that is participating in some tactical training, but I also have moved a Stryker platoon, active duty, from Fort Lewis to give the Thais a chance to look at the Stryker and its capabilities. Q And then if I could, a last -- well, you know, another question, a more macro question. You know, you're in charge of U.S. Army Pacific. What do you see, big picture, as the threats or the kinds of operations that U.S. Army Pacific should be focusing on, in terms of training but also readiness? Like, what are you looking at over the horizon that you need to be prepared for?

GEN. MIXON: Our principal focus is to build those relationships with the -- what we consider to be the key nations in the region. Simultaneously, we're helping countries like the Philippines with the problems that they have internally, as well as working with some of the other nations.

When you look at it from a strategic perspective, obviously you have to consider it from Pacific Command, whereas my focus, along with the Marine Corps Pacific elements, is on the land component of security; the naval component, with piracy issues, human trafficking; and also, as we look at the potential for linkages between these local terrorist groups and international terrorist groups, to pay attention to that; build relationships, so that we can have good intel sharing with the militaries of these various countries. So that's kind of it in a nutshell.

And then last but not least, I have responsibilities, as the commander of U.S. Army Pacific, to support those Army Forces on the Korean Peninsula, should we have a contingency arise on the peninsula.

Q Okay. Thanks.

MS. KYZER: Great. And Chuck, did you have another question?

Q Yes, I did. Sir, do you have any number about the U.S. personnel who are participating in Cobra Gold -- how many, you know, somewhat; branch of the service or anything like that?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah, let me pull out -- so I give you some accurate numbers, let me see if I can find that in my notes here. I don't want to give you something that's inaccurate. Total numbers -- I think it's up in the neighborhood of around 3,000. I believe that's about right.

But let me give you specific numbers by service component here. We've got somebody handing me a chart here. Just a second. Okay. Here we go.

So as we look at the forces that we have participating, total forces are 736 from the U.S. side, about 270 from the Thai side, and then a whole host from the other -- total numbers, when we add up -- and I'll read it to you this way -- Army, about 330; and Marines, about 3,000; Navy, about 2,500; Air Force, about 200; and then about 15 Special Operators. And then we have other Army forces that are scattered throughout the various exercises. So it's a good, healthy number for this particular exercise.

Q Okay. Can you repeat the Special Operations number again?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah. Special Operators, about 15 -- (inaudible word) -- and some small teams that are doing some work with them.

Q All right. Now --

GEN. MIXON: Total number's about 7,500.

Q Seventy-five hundred total U.S. involved?

GEN. MIXON: That's correct. Yeah, when you add everybody that's participating in the humanitarian relief operations, the headquarters training, the tactical training, the naval operations -- the Marines are going to do an amphibious landing here in the next two days -- quite a bit.

I think we have most of this on our webpage that supports the exercise, if you care to call that up.

Q Okay. Great. Now, one of the main issues that -- not to insult the Thais -- but Third World countries have typically is logistics and supply. Is any part of Cobra Gold directed towards the supporting the warfighter part of the equation?

GEN. MIXON: Well, obviously, with the operation that we've got going on now being inside of Thailand, they do not have a challenge with logistic support. As we work through the scenario, which has a fictitious place that we would be going to, we will have to work the logistics piece, probably from a strategic perspective, that we will have to give them at least help with movement either by air or by sea, on shore in this particular scenario. But internal to the exercise, the support the Thais are giving us is very good.

Q All right. And just one more quick question. We have a unique operation going on in the Philippines, and now Thailand has a similar type of insurgency going on. Do you anticipate that we would providing similar support in the future to the Thais, as we are in the Philippines?

GEN. MIXON: I do not foresee that in the near future. They certainly have not made the request. But they have requested some assistance in counter-IED training, some of the lessons we've learned in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And we will certainly provide that to them, as far as lessons learned that we have for that. And then, also, they have asked us just for some information on how we have conducted counter-insurgency operations in those environments. But I don't anticipate us having any direct involvement in the area where the insurgency is ongoing.

Q Thank you, sir.

MS. KYZER: And Rob, did you have another question?

Q I do. Sir, do you happen to know exactly which National Guard infantry battalion out of New York?

GEN. MIXON: Let me see. Off my head, I think it's the 208. Let me pull my notes out of here. Just a second. I've got this all listed in a reading packet here. (Pause.) I'll have somebody see if they can find that, but I believe it's the -- the battalion is the 208.

Q Thank you. And you mentioned a web page. Do you have a web page specifically for Cobra Gold?

GEN. MIXON: Yes, we do.

Q And exactly what is that web page, please?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah, I think if you Google "Cobra Gold," but I'll have my PAO give you a call and give you the exact URL for that.

Q Okay.

GEN. MIXON: But we're going to be posting pictures and updates on that, and so we'll pass that over to the PA over there, so that they can get it to you.

Q Okay. Now, to augment your training force for the tactical piece, did you reach to the National Guard Bureau and ask for support, or did they approach you?

GEN. MIXON: They come in -- we run annual training meetings, and we have these offers that go out, of course, through Forces Command, on our desire for infantry battalions, brigade headquarters and other elements. And a lot of times, the Guard Bureau will come in and say, yeah, we'd like some of our forces to participate in that. And quite frankly, the National Guard folks enjoy coming out to places like Thailand, Philippines, and other places like that. We've sent them into Japan to train them, the ground self-defense force. So we generally don't have any problem getting somebody to sign up to participate in an exercise in a foreign country.

Q Thank you, sir.

MS. KYZER: And if you go to "www1.apan-info.net," that should take you to Cobra Gold 2009. Or, as the General said, if you Google "Cobra Gold 2009," I think it's the first thing that pops up.

And Christian, did you have another question?

Q I did. General Mison, another sort of macro question. Have you had any occasion to, or do you have any plans to reach out army-to-army with the Chinese?

GEN. MISON: Well, we've had engagements with them in the past. They have sent participants in a very large conference we call the Pacific Area Management Seminar. We held that in Jakarta, Indonesia this year. They sent four senior participants. Our discussion on that was natural disaster relief. And we have a seminar that we do with the Chinese on disaster-relief operations, that we do annually.

We have sent observers into China.

Those relations have been strained recently because of the arms sales to Taiwan, so we haven't had anything recently, but we expect the exchanges to pick up here over the next year.

The fact of the matter is we want to engage with them. We think that's good for security in the region. So we'll take all opportunities that we can to engage with the Chinese army.

Q Do you personally want to do that?

GEN. MISON: Absolutely.

Q I mean, is this something that you see as -- personally, as someone who's dealt with -- I mean, you were in Iraq for a year. You know, you understand how difficult these old, you know, tensions can be. How do you feel about that?

GEN. MISON: I'm very excited about it. I have engaged one on one with them in the meetings that we've had. I've been invited to China, but unfortunately, the trip that I had scheduled was right -- occurred right about the time they had the major earthquake, so it had to be canceled. But I expect to get an invite there, you know, when these relations open back up. I think it's critical that we keep dialogue and engagements with them so they understand us and that we understand them.

Q Okay. Thanks a lot.

MS. KYZER: I'll open the floor to any follow-up or additional questions.

Q General, you've indicated that the Marines are going to be conducting a landing. That -- will that also involve any Thai marines, or any marines from other nations? Or is this just a demonstration by our Marine Corps?

GEN. MIXON: No, it's -- that's joint training between the Thai marines and our Marines.

Q Oh, they'll be in the boats as well, then.

GEN. MIXON: That's my understanding. Q Or on the (other ?) craft.

GEN. MIXON: I couldn't tell you 100 percent sure how many of them will be with them, but I know it is going to be a combined operation with them.

Q And will it be, you know, Marine air and naval support in the whole -- will it be a complete demonstration or will -- or more just a landing demonstration?

GEN. MIXON: Let me say that it's not a demonstration. It's going to be actual training with a realistic scenario.

Q Okay.

GEN. MIXON: The integrated air -- Marine, air and so forth, just like the Marines do their business, because it's a great opportunity, you know, for us as well, as a joint force, to work through the coordination for those types of operations. Because the Marines, just like the Army, wants to return a focus on these types of conventional operations -- that we have lost some of our skill sets during the last seven years of counterinsurgency operations.

Q Okay. So this is -- you know, the Thais will experience a combined Army-Marine assault?

GEN. MIXON: Without a doubt.

Q Thank you.

GEN. MIXON: And you know, when you talk about strategic communications, all of those kinds of things occurring in this region have a significant impact on demonstrating our continued ability to project power. And certainly you know that the -- those elements from the People's Republic of China are watching all of that very closely.

Q I have a quick follow-up, if that's okay.

GEN. MIXON: Sure.

MS. KYZER: Yeah, that's fine.

Q Okay. Thanks.

General Mixon, I'd like to follow up on something you just said. You said the Marine Corps wants to do this training because they want to return to focus on these conventional skill sets, you know, that basically were -- they were unable to do, and the Army is in the same boat because of the focus on counterinsurgency and the deployments to Iraq.

But hasn't the secretary of Defense said and most of his staff said that counterinsurgencies and insurgencies are the kind of conflicts we're going to be facing for the foreseeable future? So why is it that you have to devote this kind of -- these kinds of resources, these conventional amphibious landings

that a lot of people say, including your bosses, say is not going to be the kind of warfare that's fought in the future?

GEN. MIXON: Well, I wasn't present when the secretary made the statement, so I'm not sure of the context. I did read some of the articles.

But I also do believe that the nation -- and I think he would too -- would expect us to have proficiency in major combat operations. So we have to achieve a balance. And there is no question that we will continue to put a high emphasis on counterinsurgency operations and those types of operations, but we absolutely must maintain those skills at the same time.

Right now the priority is on counterinsurgency operations, but when we have the time and opportunity, like we have during this particular scenario that we have here in Thailand, Army and Marine forces are going to take the opportunity to practice some of those skill sets.

Q Okay. Thank.

GEN. MIXON: I'm certainly not disagreeing with the secretary, but I think that what we're doing in the Army and then the Marines are doing is certainly in line with the guidance that has been put out from higher headquarters and from the department.

Q Roger.

Q Sir, I have one last for you. I write from the perspective of an NCO. So if you could, just give me your feelings on the importance of your NCO corps in this operation.

GEN. MIXON: Well, I think, most of you may know that the Army has decided that this will be declared as the year of the NCO, to spotlight how important our non-commissioned officers have been, during the last seven years of war and certainly in the last many years.

They are absolutely essential to what we are doing in the training here. They will lead most of the training if not all of the training. They will do most of the tactical interface with the Thais and the other military.

I have made a special point to ensure that I've got my senior non-commissioned officers that are a part of my staff present and visible, so that the other armies that are here can see that our NCOs not only do tactical training but they're a valuable part of all of our headquarters' operations, even one at the level of U.S. Army Pacific. So without a doubt absolutely essential and they're definitely going to get a good workout here in Thailand.

Q Thank you, sir.

MS. KYZER: Okay, any final questions.

With that, we'll go ahead and wrap up. I'll again turn it over to Lieutenant General Mixon, in case there was anything that wasn't touched on or anything he'd like to add, as we close.

Sir.



GEN. MIXON: Let me wrap up. Just there was a question about the National Guard element. It's the 2nd of the 108th is the infantry battalion. And then we have elements from the 2nd of the 23rd Infantry out of Fort Lewis. So those are the elements; the 2nd of the 108th of the National Guard.

Can't resist making a comment. I heard a sidebar conversation, before we were joined, about the debate concerning the protective equipment, flak vest or whatever you want to call it, that we've got. You know, I don't know the science necessarily behind it. But I can tell you, it saved a large and significant number of lives during my 15 months in Iraq.

So I can just say that the equipment was working for the soldiers that were under my command in Iraq. I can't dispute any of the claims by any of the other agencies, but I know what I saw in Iraq, and it was definitely worth its weight in gold over there.

Having said that, appreciate you all joining in. I enjoy doing these things. I did one from Yama Sakura in Japan back in December, and we'll try to make ourselves available whenever we can to this type of forum to get the word out about what the U.S. Army in the Pacific is doing to enhance security in the Pacific region, a region that I believe and a lot of other folks smarter than me believe's going to play an important part in the security of the United States over the next many years.

So thank you all for joining in.

MS. KYZER: Thank you so much, sir, for your time. We definitely appreciate your taking the time to join us.

Thank you for the bloggers who are on the line. And we'll have a transcript following the roundtable. Have a great morning.

Q Thank you.

END.